Long-time 'hammer' still going strong

By **MIKE JACQUART**
Journal staff

neighbors

You could say that Art Wysocki was ahead of his time.

As a member of the Central Wisconsin Radio Amateurs, Wysocki has talked to people across the globe long before anyone ever visited online chat rooms or fired off e-mails.

Wysocki, 63, has been a member of the group since 1978. The radio club, which has about 80 members, meets the second Wednesday of each month in the science building at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

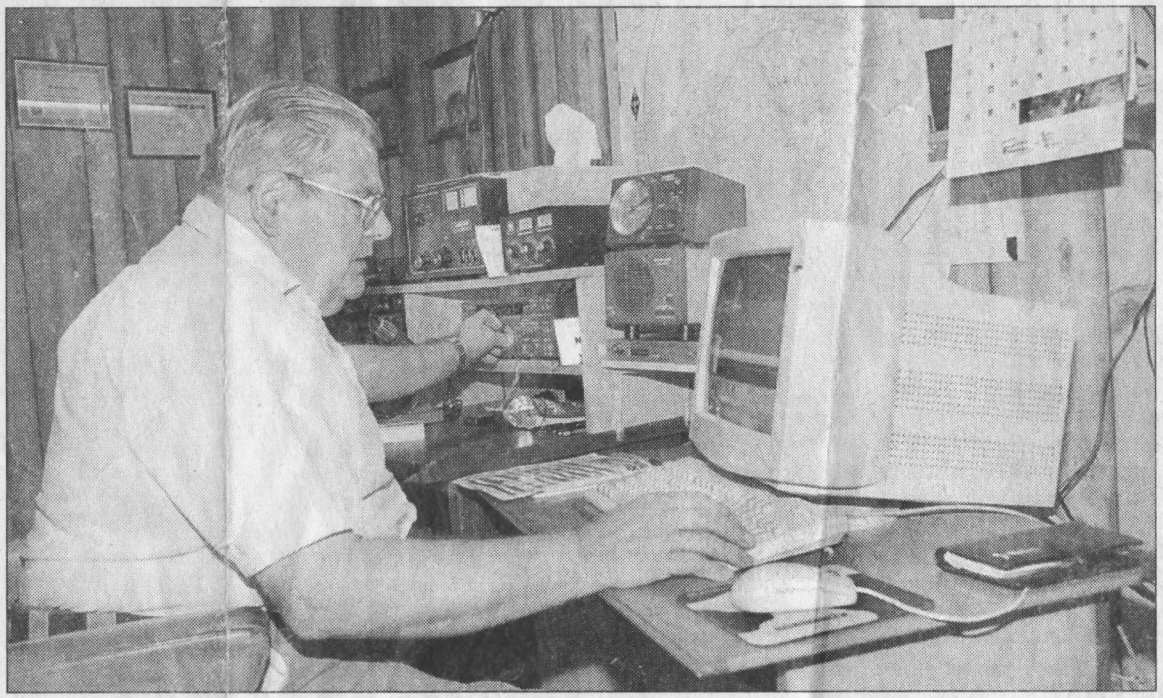
Even though Wysocki has been a member for 22 years, he had actually thought about joining long before that.

"I had always been interested," he said. "I knew people in it, but I didn't know who to ask."

The hobby was a natural extension of working nights at Consolidated Papers.

"It was an outgrowth of being up late," said Wysocki, who has been retired for two years. "I worked from 5 (p.m.) to 1 (a.m.), so I'd come home and get on the ham radio."

Wysocki keeps track of the countries he's contacted, which include Chile, New Zealand, Venezuela and Argentina.



Journal photo by Doug Wojcik

ART WYSOCKI tries to make contact with other amateur radio operators at his home, 1830 Highway PP.

While he enjoys meeting other people, Wysocki said he's never learned other languages.

"They have to speak English to me," he said with a laugh.

Weather conditions and other variables make it

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impossible to predict who and where one will be able to contact another ham radio operator.

"You pick 'em up or you don't. That's the fun of ham radio," Wysocki said.

"Hammers," as amateur radio operators are often called, are more likely to know someone by their call letters than by their name. Wysocki, for instance, is "N9BCA." He joked that the BCA stands for "Best Call Around."

The call letters must legally be broadcast every 10 minutes, he noted.

Wysocki said the hobby gives him a chance to meet other people from all over the world.

"You have regular contact with some," he said. "It's great camaraderie. I haven't visited any 'hammers,' but others have."

For instance, he said Mike Pagel, an area resident and fellow "hammer," visited another radio enthusiast in Russia.

Wysocki exchanges postcards with other hammers. Some are returned due to incorrect addresses, but he said he's used his computer to help remedy that problem by printing names and addresses of the radio operators he contacts.

In another technology boost, Wysocki's teletype comes in via computer.

"Everything (air waves) goes through the computer now. Before, it was bang, bang, bang."

While Wysocki prefers teletype, he noted that other operators use Morse code and some even bounce signals off the moon.

"There are 26, 27 different facets of ham radio. There's something for everybody," he said.

Wysocki is glad more youths are getting involved in the hobby.

"We weren't getting too many 'hams.' Now, as they grow up with computers, they're coming back to 'ham,' " he said.

While operators generally talk about conversational topics, they can also turn serious when the weather is bad. Involvement in ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Services) and RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services) — organizations that have since merged — ensures radio help during severe weather.

But, mostly, ham radio is fun for Wysocki, who spends four or five hours a day on his hobby.

"Being retired helps to find time. You wonder how you found time to work," he quipped.

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